

We come together today to pay tribute to brave Americans in Viet Nam who, in the words of Lincoln, gave their “last full measure of devotion” to country. We honor those who have honored us beyond measure.

With heartfelt humility and gratitude, we acknowledge that we can never fully repay those who have given us their precious gift of life.

We recognize that no words can ever truly express our thanks for such sacrifice. Yet, we know it is our common bond of duty to ensure their lives, their service and their sacrifices are not forgotten.

That is what this Viet Nam Memorial is about. That is what this rededication ceremony is about. We come here today to rededicate this Memorial. In doing so, we honor these great Americans and the cause for which they died—the defense of our God-given freedom.

Let it be said that these veterans and all who served with them were faithful stewards of that freedom. They held high the torch of liberty that first burned at Lexington and Concord and then echoed from Flanders Fields in John McRae’s words, “Take up our quarrel with the foe; To you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high. If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders Fields.”

Let it be said that our Viet Nam veterans kept faith with all who had gone before them—from the frozen river at Valley Forge to the Argonne forest, from the blood-stained beaches of Normandy to the Chosin Reservoir in Korea.

I believe our Viet Nam veterans, along with our Korean vets, played a key role in winning the Cold War—a nearly half century war that finally ended with the fall of the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain. Had they not stood up to the threat of communism and made them pay a heavy

price for their aggression and vision of world domination, the Iron Curtain might still be darkening the nations of Eastern Europe and Asia would be a different place today.

Let us remember that those on this monument were not just names. They were Americans who fought in freedom's name. They were our neighbors. They were fathers, brothers and sons. They did not want to leave their families, but they answered their nation's call to duty, just as generations before them had done.

Death was not their choice. Heroism was not their goal, but through their sacrifice, they became heroes for the ages. Surely, they wanted to return home to the hugs of their children—to the love of their families. They wanted to once again feel the joy of watching their children grow. They dreamed of living a long life where one day they could be called Granddad or Grandmother and savor the warmth of a grandchild tucked in their arms.

One can only wonder what might have been for those whose lives were cut short by their service to country. What families might have been started or grown? What songs might have been written or sung? What businesses might have been created? What love and warmth and kindness might have been ours to know?

What we do know is that over 58,000 Americans in Viet Nam joined the sacred honor roll of 1 million Americans who have died to keep our country free. What we do know is that, because of their sacrifice, Americans can pray in our own way and express our views of conscience without fear of being imprisoned. What we do know is that we Americans have opportunities that most people of the world could only dream about.

We owe so much to Gerald Ray Roberts, Dennis Wayne Fisher and Frank Westerfield, whose names will be added to this monument.

Navy Lt. Commander Gerald Ray Roberts was 31 and a devoted husband and father when he died on a bombing mission over North Viet Nam on December 2nd, 1965. He was the son of a high school principal, his mother, who also taught him math. His lifelong dream had been to fly for the U.S. Navy.

Army Private First Class Dennis Wayne Fisher was born in Cameron but spent much of his youth with his grandmother here in Waco. At 19 he became a soldier and joined the "Go Devils" regiment that was known for their fierce ability to hit and run against the Viet Cong. In just 77 days in Viet Nam, this young American earned the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. On December 29, 1968, Dennis Wayne Fisher was killed in Long An Province. This young hero is now at eternal rest in Waco's Rosemound Cemetery.

Marine 2nd Lieutenant Frank Brown Westerfield grew up in McGregor. He served in both Korea and Viet Nam. In Korea he earned five Purple Hearts and the Silver Star. In Viet Nam, this loving father of four was only weeks away from coming home when he refused safe passage to Okinawa, because he felt he had a duty to stay with his fellow Marines. On July 5, 1965, at the age of 37, Lt. Westerfield was killed in a massive mortar attack. On the day of his funeral in McGregor, the community closed its stores and businesses and lined Main Avenue with American flags and banners.

These are the kind of unsung heroes that have made America "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

We owe so much to their families and loved ones whose sacrifice did not end when the war was over. We owe so much to all who died and all who served with these patriots.

Let us today rededicate this Memorial. Let us also rededicate ourselves to ensuring that we will honor their sacrifice by remembering them and by keeping our promise to those who have kept their promise to defend our nation. Let us honor them by our service to others, to our communities and our country. Let us honor our Viet Nam veterans and all of America's veterans, not just with our words but with our deeds. As beneficiaries of their sacrifice, let us be good and faithful stewards of all the blessings we cherish as Americans.

May God bless our veterans and our troops and their families, and may God bless America, the land we love.